



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A LETTER OF ESARHADDON.

BY CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTON,
Johns Hopkins University.

The text Bu. 91-5-9, 210, published in Harper's *Letters* (No. **403**),¹ presents several points of interest. The pithy proverbs so appositely quoted (obv. ll. 4-7, 14-15), and its general tone of contemptuous sarcasm, give it a distinct individuality among Assyrian letters, and reveal something of the personal characteristics of the writer, who evidently possessed a certain grim sense of humor. It proceeds from a king of Assyria, unquestionably of the Sargonide dynasty, and is addressed to a people called the "non-Babylonians," which means, as shown by the context, that they have presumed to style themselves Babylonian citizens, although they possess no just claim to the name. They have, moreover, aggravated their offense by bringing lying accusations against the king's faithful servants,² and the king intimates that, though for the present they have crept into a warm nest, they may find it ere long altogether too warm for comfort. These allusions seem to leave little doubt as to the personality of the writer and the occasion by which the letter was called forth.

When Babylon was destroyed by Sennacherib in 689 B. C., its inhabitants were driven from their possessions and scattered throughout the country. The land about the city, thus left vacant, was promptly seized upon by the Chaldeans of Bit-Dakkuri, who appear to have occupied it unmolested during the remainder of Sennacherib's reign. Esarhaddon, however, completely reversed his father's policy in regard to Babylon. At the very beginning of his reign he undertook to rebuild the city, to gather its dispersed people, and to restore them to their former possessions, with all their ancient rights and privileges.³ This could hardly have been very welcome news to the interlopers from Bit-Dakkuri and their king, Šamaš-ibnī, who doubtless conceived themselves rather unjustly treated. With the destruction of Babylon and the exile of its inhabitants the latter had necessarily lost all their civil rights, and their land had thus become ownerless. The

¹ Part IV, pp. 420, 421.

² Presumably the real Babylonians.

³ Cf. *B.A.*, III, p. 252, ll. 18 *sqq.*

people of Bit-Dakkuri could hardly have taken possession of it without at least the tacit consent of Sennacherib, and they must have considered that their occupation of it for so long a time gave them a prescriptive right to it. If then Babylon was to be restored to its former position, it was fitting, they doubtless argued, that they themselves, as loyal subjects of Assyria, should reap the benefits of the fact, rather than the former rebels who had been expelled by Esarhaddon's father. It is hardly conceivable that they should have yielded up the lands without some sort of protest, and it is more than probable that, in any communication they may have addressed to the king upon the subject, they would assume for themselves the status of Babylonian citizens. From their own point of view they were justly entitled to advance such a claim, as the actual occupants of the land, and it is likely that they would enlarge upon their own loyalty and protest against the restoration of the former inhabitants, whom they would naturally represent as outlaws justly punished for their rebellion against Assyria. That their statement of the case against the exiled Babylonians may have been somewhat highly colored need excite no surprise.

To Esarhaddon, however, the matter wore a very different aspect. As the divinely appointed restorer of Babylon, his mission included the complete rehabilitation of the former inhabitants, and this could hardly be effected without dispossessing the Chaldean settlers. It was true that the wrath of Marduk had been kindled for a season against his people, but they had now sufficiently expiated their sin,⁴ and those who had taken advantage of their distress to seize upon their property must now be forced to disgorge their ill-gotten gains. Of course, back of all this lay well-defined motives of worldly policy. The ruthless destruction of the Holy City by Sennacherib and his profanation of its shrines had sent a thrill of horror through western Asia, and had added a large item to the long account against Assyria. The restoration of Babylon was an assurance of a milder policy, and doubtless tended to promote a better feeling throughout the empire. But more especially, Esarhaddon needed the support of the city as a bulwark against Elamite aggression. A new Babylon peopled by its former inhabitants who, relieved from a wretched exile, had every reason to bless the king as their deliverer, might well serve this purpose. But a new Babylon peopled largely by Chaldeans,

⁴ Cf. *BA.*, III, pp. 218-20, col. i, l. 7—col. ii, l. 18.

who had on many occasions shown themselves more friendly to Elam than to Assyria, was quite another matter. Under these circumstances the people of Bit-Dakkuri were likely to receive a rather curt reply to their remonstrances, and the sequel is told in the annals of Esarhaddon:

I ravaged the Chaldean territory of Bit-Dakkuri, the foe of Babylon. I captured Šamaš-ibnī [their king], a wicked wretch who feared not the name of the lord of lords, but seized by force the lands of the people of Babylon and Borsippa, and converted them to his own use. Because I fear Bēl and Nabū I restored those lands to the people of Babylon and Borsippa and placed Nabū-sallim, son of Balasu, upon the throne⁵ as my vassal.⁶

The text under consideration harmonizes well with all the attending circumstances, and I believe that it is the answer sent by Esarhaddon to the remonstrances of the people of Bit-Dakkuri. The letter may be translated as follows:

TRANSLATION.

The word of the king to the self-styled Babylonians! It is well with me! There is a popular saying current, to this effect: "The potter's dog creeps into the oven; the potter makes up the fire." Behold! you have turned yourselves into Babylonians, although indeed it is not true (that you are such), and you have made against my servants lying accusations which you and your lord have concocted. There is also a saying current: "Madam Gay at the judge's door; Madam Judge to her pitcher." The tablet (full) of windy words and of your complaints(?) which you have sent, I have put back in its seals and send it to you. If you say "What answer does he make us?" (I reply): When I opened (your letter) and read (your words) that the "Babylonians my loving servants have sent" (I said)

TRANSLITERATION.

Obverse.

- 1 amāt šarri
ana lā ^{am}Bābīlā!
Šulmu āši!
ina batti ša pī nišē šakin
- 5 umma: kalbu ša ^{am}paxāri
ina libbi utūni kī erubu
ana libbi ^{am}paxāru unampax.
enna! attunu, kī lā kân-ma,
ramānkunu ana ^{am}Bābīlā
- 10 tutterā u dibbē lā dibbē,

⁵ Of Bit-Dakkuri.

⁶ *KB.*, II, p. 146, ll. 19 *sqq.*; *cf. ibid.*, p. 128, ll. 42 *sqq.*

- ša attunu u belkunu tetepuša
 ana muxxi ardāniya šaknātunu.
 ina battīma ša pī šakin
 umma: ^{sa}lxaditu ina bāb bit ^{am}da'āni;
 15 kašallaša aššatu ša da'an.
 duppu šārē u mexānātikunu
 ša tašpurāni, ina kunukkēša
 kī uteru, ultebilākunuši.
 mindēma taqābā
 20 umma: minā uterānaši
 ultu ^{am}Bābilā

Reverse.

ardāniya u ra'imāniya
 išparūni, kī aptū, altāši:
 enna! ṭābat ina reti iṣṣurē xiddi
 ša

NOTES.

Obverse.

L. 2. lā Bābilā, literally "the not Babylonians;" cf. obv. ll. 8, 9.

L. 3. The omission of the usual formula of greeting libbakunu lū ṭābkunuši, or its equivalent, is, of course intentional and marks the contemptuous tone of the letter.

L. 4. ina batti "round about," "in circulation;" see below, l. 13, and cf. ina batti anniti, K. 1189 (= Harper's *Letters* No. 103), rev. 10. The reduplicated form battibatti is more common; cf. Del., *HW.*, 192b.

Ll. 5-7. Literally "when the potter's dog has entered the oven, the potter makes up the fire therein." The sense of the proverb is that those who place themselves in situations where they have no business to be may find the consequences unpleasant. The application is clear.

L. 8. kī lā kân-ma. For kânu in this meaning compare Del., *HW.*, 321b.

L. 10. dibbē lā dibbē, literally "words (which are) no words," i. e., false, lying words. The same expression occurs in K. 625 (= Harper's *Letters* No. 131), rev. ll. 7, 8.

L. 11. belkunu, i. e., Šamaš-ibnī.

L. 14. ^{sa}lxaditu, literally "the gay lady;" cf. the French *filles de joie*.

L. 15. kašalla "pitcher." In V R. 42, 10, KA.ŠAL.LA occurs in a list of vessels with the determinative DUK = karpātu. It seems to mean "the wide-mouthed vessel," and KA.DAGAL.LA immediately follows. For ŠAL = rapāšu, cf. Del., *HW.*, 422a, 626a. The meaning and application are the same as in the proverb cited above (ll. 5-7). If the "gay lady" ensnares the judge and undertakes to invade his home, his legitimate spouse is likely to repulse the intruder by drenching her

with water. The grave character of the judge lends special point to the proverb, which may be based upon some popular story.

L. 16. This line presents some difficulty. I have taken IM.MEŠ = šârê as meaning "windy, empty words." mexânâti is perhaps to be connected with mexû "storm," and in this case would properly mean "howlings" or something similar.

L. 17. kunukkêša. I take kunukkê as meaning the clay envelope, impressed with seals, in which Assyrian tablets were sometimes incased.

L. 21. ultu is here a conjunction, "when, as soon as."

Reverse.

L. 2. išparûni "they have sent." Beside the usual preterite išpur, šapâru also forms a preterite išpar. The following examples are to be found in Harper's *Letters*: ašpar, No. 342, rev. 19; išparûnišu, No. 158, 21; lišparûni, Nos. 170, rev. 16; 196, 18; 388, rev. 2; 414, 19.

altâši = altâsi, from šasû; for the occurrence of š instead of s in Assyrian texts cf. Del., *Gram.*, § 46. The construction is ultu . . . , kî aptû, altâši "when, having opened (your letter), I read (your words)." I take the clause ^{am}Bâbilâ—išparûni as the object of altâši, and regard it as a quotation from the letter addressed to the king by the people of Bit-Dakkuri.

L. 3. I have thought it best to leave this line untranslated, as the context is obscured by the obliteration of the remainder of the text.